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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

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SECURITY INFORMATION

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INFORMATION REPORT

REPORT NO. [REDACTED]

CD NO. [REDACTED]

COUNTRY USSR (Latvian SSR)

DATE DISTR. 6 February 1953

SUBJECT The Istrebiteli, a Soviet Auxiliary
Security Organization in LatviaNO. OF PAGES₃DATE OF
INFO. [REDACTED]FOR CRITICAL SECURITY REASONS
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ACQUIRED [REDACTED]SUPPLEMENT TO
REPORT NO.

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1. The Istrebiteli (in Russian "destroyers") are auxiliaries directly subordinate to the local Soviet security authorities, who are enrolled for the purpose of assisting in the maintenance of security in the interior of the country, and taking part in the campaign against partisans and diversionaries or diversanty.¹ The latter are much publicized in local propaganda and reputed to be persons infiltrated into the country from the West for the purpose of inciting the people against the Communist regime.
2. So far as is known, the organization consists of persons whose local knowledge may be useful, comprising volunteers enrolled from countryfolk who are loyal to the Communist regime, or who belong to the Komsomol, or who are forced into the service by the well-known MGB methods. They are dispersed about the countryside in villages, small towns, and on kolkhozy. Their rate of pay is believed to be very low, but they are reputed to receive awards for participating in active operations.
3. Istrebiteli do not wear distinctive uniform and are usually dressed in a mixture of items of military uniform and civilian clothes. They do not possess their own means of transport, but they can use horses and trucks belonging to the collective farms when authorized to do so by the security authorities.
4. The conditions of service in the istrebiteli are not known but, judging from the following incident, it is apparently possible to resign from the organization. Some time in 1950, one partisan group captured a member of the istrebiteli, who turned out to be a boy of fifteen or sixteen years of age. The partisan commander told him to go home, hand in his rifle, and leave the istrebiteli; otherwise, if he was caught again, he would get a

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thoroughly good "hiding". Subsequently the partisans learned through their supporters in that village that the boy had obeyed their instructions and had left the istrebiteli. It must be admitted, however, that the circumstances of this particular case may have been exceptional, because of the extreme youth of the member involved.

5. Istrebiteli are used in local operations which are carried out under the command of the security forces for combing the forests for partisans. One such action which took place in the Kurzeme area in 1946 is quoted as an outstanding example, because the partisan force in the forest, consisting of fifteen to twenty men, was estimated to be outnumbered by five or six times, but inflicted very heavy casualties. Subsequent actions in this area have been on a smaller scale. The morale and fighting skill of the istrebiteli have always been and still are regarded by the partisans to be of very low standard.
6. The tactics employed by the security forces against the partisans usually conform to the following pattern. When they suspect partisans of being in a certain area of a forest, they usually concentrate a company (Latvian "rota") of approximately 150 men at some nearby farmhouse. The number is generally about 150, because they dare not attack with fewer men and more men for this type of operation are rarely available to them, even when the regular Soviet MGB troops are supplemented by local istrebiteli. Furthermore, any concentration of larger units would attract too much attention among the local inhabitants, a part of whom are supporters of the partisans, and thus the partisans would be warned in time for them to leave the area and set up camp in a new place in the forest.
7. The security troops first set up stationary light machine-gun posts, consisting of some four men to each post. (see sketch), at the corners of the area, overlooking the glades (the forest as a rule, is criss-crossed with long, straight glades where the trees have been felled to stop forest fires from spreading). Then they place hidden soldiers armed with rifles on two sides of the suspected area between the machine-gun posts. When the attack begins, they march in extended order, armed with carbines and rifles, the distance between each man being approximately 10 - 15 meters, and march right through the suspected area.
8. The partisan tactics are usually to try to break out between the hidden machine-gun posts on the opposite side to that from which the attack is coming, or else try to break out to either side of the attack. In desperate cases, they fight their way through the lines in the direction of the attack, regardless of losses. In most cases, they leave a partisan hidden at the camp to fight a delaying, misleading action against the attackers to facilitate the escape of the rest of the unit. The partisan fighter who is left behind has only a very slender chance of survival.
9. The following is an account from a participant of such an attack, which took place in June 1951. A partisan group, numbering nine men, were encamped in a forest a short distance from a highway. The camp was only a light superstructure above ground among very thick bushes and fir trees, and consisted of a few posts covered with roofing felt and one wall of felt, just enough to sleep in and provide shelter for the equipment from the rain. Towards the end of May, one of the partisan supporters informed the leader of the group that he had the day before observed the arrival of four trucks with approximately 150 MGB troops and that they had made camp in two deserted farmhouses just north of the highway and located five kilometers east and six kilometers west of the site of the partisan camp. They appeared to be preparing to comb the forest.

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10. The partisan commander ordered his unit to be prepared for any eventuality, and established patrols and sentries, but decided not to break camp before the attack developed because of the greater risk of running into the hidden sentries set up by the MGB, and to wait until the situation became more clear.
11. Three days later, early in the morning, the troops started to comb the adjoining area of the forest, and at about 2000 hours they reached the forest sector (approximately 800 x 800 meters) in which the partisan camp was located. This was at once reported by the partisan sentry who had been on duty near the glade west-south-west of the camp. The commander gave orders to break camp immediately. Two men went ahead, followed at a distance of some 200 meters by the commander and four others. Three were able-bodied and one was ill and could hardly walk and had to be carried over the more difficult terrain. Behind them at a distance of about 150 meters was a man to guard their rear, and the last man, who was the second-in-command, remained hidden in bushes approximately 150 meters south-west of the camp, with orders to shoot the patrol dogs should the MGB bring any with them, and to fight a delaying and misleading action as long as possible. He was armed with a Soviet paratroop machine carbine.
12. Leaving the camp took about three minutes. The partisans went south at first and after a few hundred meters turned east to the glade, and then south along the glade to the highway, which they reached and crossed without incident, and then waited for the last man, although it had never before been heard of that anyone left behind to fight a delaying action had managed to get away. Normally, it would have been impossible to move along the glade, but in this particular case the glades had not been cleared for some years and were overgrown with bushes and young trees, which obstructed the view for the MGB machine-gun posts.
13. The last man did, in fact, rejoin his group some three hours later. He reported that the troops sighted the partisan camp when they were some 50 to 100 meters from it and concentrated their forces opposite the camp, opening fire with machine-guns. Then they entered the camp, found it empty, and went around it in a south-east direction. When they were some 40 meters east of him, he fired two magazines and saw two men collapse at once, and a third sink slowly to the ground. He turned in a south-west direction, pursued by the troops and then, turning south-east, ran towards the highway. He heard the pursuit continuing in a south-west direction.
14. A few days later, partisan supporters reported that three MGB soldiers had been taken in ordinary farm carts to the hospital in a nearby town and all three appeared to be dead or severely wounded. Meanwhile, the partisan group continued marching through the forest, halting and waiting at intervals to see whether they were being followed or if the MGB would trace them with the help of dogs, and eventually they reached thick undergrowth, where they set up a new camp.²

1. Comment: The term "security authorities" is used because informant was not able to say definitely whether the istrebiteli were subordinate to the MGB or the MVD. Locally, these authorities are still referred to indiscriminately as the Cheka or the NKVD.

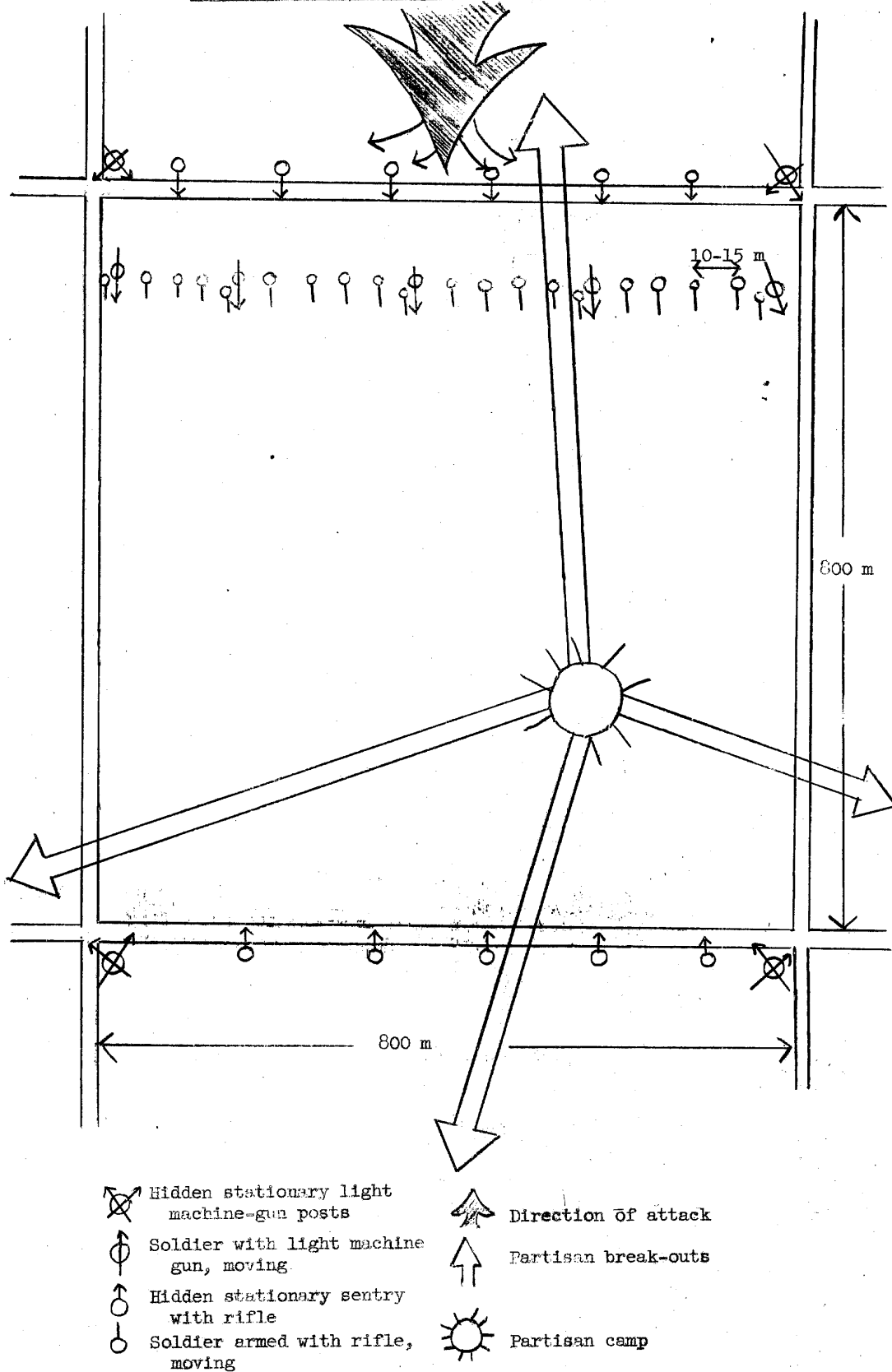
2. Comment: It must be remembered that the areas of the country where the partisans live and operate are covered by large and dense forests, extending in places for scores of miles, which render such partisan maneuvers possible.

Attachment: Map of typical MGB operation against a partisan unit.

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Attachment

Typical MGB Operation against a Partisan Unit

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